Ethiopian Massacre

Little more than two years ago the first Italian troops embarked for East Africa for the conquest of Emperor Haile Selassie's domain. On May 9, 1936, Premier Benito Mussolini proclaimed Ethiopia's annexation to Italy and creation of the Italian empire. Since then consolidation of Italian power has proceeded rapidly as Ethiopian resistance has approached the vanishing point.

So rapid has been the progress of subduing the hostile tribes and guerrilla bands that Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, viceroy of Selassie's lost kingdom, returned to Addis Ababa last week from a two-weeks' tour of the most recently subjugated southern regions without molestation to declare: "My trip demonstrates that everyhere tranquillity is absolute, and everywhere the population is with Italy."

But Mussolini's "white hope" in black Africa apparently spoke too soon. The very next day an attempt was made to assassinate the 55-year-old Graziani, whose rule is admittedly severe and ruthless. Then tranquillity became turmoil; the assassins' plot became an Ethiopian massacre. Acting under direct orders from Mussolini that the assassins be shot by firing squads, six-foot, "tough as nails" Graziani called 30,000 troops in the Addis Ababa area into the city. Placed on a war basis, he ordered them to seek out the culprits. Carabinieri and Blackshirts arrested 2,000 natives, suspects and possible witnesses.

Later last week 30 prominent Ethiopians were tried as ringleaders in the attempted assassination. They were to serve as "public examples" of Italy's determination to rule over her new African domain. All other natives found in possession of arms were shot by Fascist firing squads, more than 1,000 terrified men being mowed down in a bloody Mussolini-ordered revenge. In an engagement near the capital some 3,000 of Ras Desta Demtu's ragged army were reported annihilated. For further reprisal Il Duce decreed death for all native chieftains continuing opposition to his rule.

Graziani received his first wound in 30 years of African service shortly after he stepped from a Coptic church in the capital following services celebrating the birth of the Prince of Naples, son of Crown Prince Humbert of Italy and possible future emperor of Ethiopia. Surrounded by high Italian officials and Ethiopian church dignitaries, the Marshal distributed gifts to a group of native poor. When he had finished, a number of hand grenades were thrown at the official party by tribesmen who had joined the poor without exciting suspicion, the deadly missiles concealed beneath their white shammas. General Aureilo Liotta, commander of the Italian air force in Ethiopia, was so gravely wounded he had his leg amputated. Abuna Kyrillos, Coptic Bishop of Ethiopia, and several chieftains were also seriously wounded. Italian officials believed Ras Desta Demtu, a son-in-law of the conquered Selassie, possibly inspired by Communist agents, engineered the plot.

PATHFINDER
March 6, 1937 : p. 7

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